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Despite numerous successes in the HIV/AIDS prevention and care arena over the past 25 years, several challenges remain. HIV/AIDS continues to be a leading cause of illness and death in the United States. Current estimates by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) indicate that 25% of people infected with HIV are unaware of their status. That translates to approximately 1,000 Hoosiers and more than 30,000 people nationwide.

With HIV/AIDS continuing to affect African Americans at higher rates than any other racial or ethnic group in the United States and locally we are committed to re-examining, strengthening and intensifying our efforts to address the epidemic. To this end, there are four main focus areas that have been developed nationally and adopted locally:

1. expanding the reach of prevention services
2. increasing opportunities for diagnosing and treating HIV
3. developing new, effective prevention interventions
4. mobilizing broader community action

While these ideas were developed with the African American community in mind, and rightly so, they are concepts that can cross racial and ethnic lines.

Expanding the reach of HIV prevention services involves commitment from all local health departments, community based organizations, community members and healthcare providers to think and act outside of the traditional box. One way to do that is to build relationships with other organizations that provide social services that are not HIV related in an effort to make HIV prevention information more accessible. This can include training and employment agencies, housing agencies, food pantries or mental health centers. Another way is to strengthen collaborations and relationships that already exist within the social and community service realm to disseminate appropriate and accurate HIV preventions information and resource materials.

The goal behind increasing opportunities for diagnosis and treatment of HIV is to ensure that every Hoosier knows whether or not he or she is infected with HIV. Achieving this goal involves a commitment to spreading the message that knowledge is prevention when, and only when, someone knows he is infected and makes choices to keep himself from infecting others. It is also critical that testing be offered in all appropriate and available settings, as well as making it a normal part of health care services and screenings. Early diagnosis and proper treatment goes a long way to improved quality of life for infected individuals.

To achieve the goal of increasing the number of effective prevention interventions, there must be a commitment by health departments, healthcare providers, academic institutions, community-based organizations and community members to encourage participation of researchers in this effort. Community stakeholders have to be made aware of and involved in the development and implementation of research designs that address the myriad of issues related to accessing HIV prevention, treatment and care services.

In an effort to mobilize broader community action, it is imperative that we break the silence and increase awareness of HIV/AIDS among friends, family, co-workers and others within our communities. We must engage our community leaders in efforts to change community perceptions about HIV/AIDS, challenge and reduce the stigma associated with the disease, motivate people to seek early diagnosis and treatment, and encourage healthy behaviors.

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